



April 15, 2005

Central Falls couple sentenced to prison, forfeit home for cocaine trafficking

A federal judge has sentenced **Shawn Montegio**, 31 of Central Falls, to 248 months in federal prison for cocaine trafficking and related firearms offenses. In February 2003, federal agents seized nine kilograms of cocaine and a handgun from a Claremont Street home that Montegio shared with **Maria Benevides**. Another judge today sentenced Benevides to 37 months in prison for her role in the cocaine-trafficking conspiracy. Benevides has also forfeited the Claremont Street house to the federal government.

United States Attorney Robert Clark Corrente announced the sentences, which were imposed in U.S. District Court, Providence. U.S. District Court Judge William E. Smith sentenced Montegio on April 8 and U.S. District Court Judge Mary M. Lisi sentenced Benevides today.

At a hearing in August 2003 when Montegio pleaded guilty, Assistant U.S. Attorney Kenneth P. Madden said that agents of the **High Intensity Drug Trafficking Area (HIDTA) Task Force** had been monitoring Montegio's activities and learned that a shipment of cocaine was headed for Montegio.

On February 9, 2003, agents observed a car with Virginia license plates arrive at Montegio's home at 45 Claremont Street. Two men left the vehicle, one of them carrying a duffel bag, and went into the house. About 90 minutes later, agents entered the house,

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arrested all three men, and seized nine kilograms of cocaine, Montegio's .40 caliber pistol, and \$115,000 in cash. At another location, agents seized an additional \$198,700 linked to Montegio's drug trafficking.

Montegio pleaded guilty to conspiracy to distribute more than five kilograms of cocaine, possessing with intent to distribute more than five kilograms of cocaine, being a felon in possession of a firearm, and having a firearm in connection with a drug-trafficking offense.

House sold for \$283,000

Benevides, 29, was indicted separately and pleaded guilty last year to conspiracy to traffic in cocaine and aiding and abetting cocaine trafficking. In October 2003, in a related action brought by the U.S. Attorney, Judge Smith issued an order forfeiting the house, which Benevides owned, because it had been used to facilitate drug trafficking. The U.S. Marshals Service sold the house this week for \$283,000.

Francisco Jose Bermudez, 33, of Queens, New York, one of the two men who had arrived in the car with the cocaine, pleaded guilty to drug-trafficking charges and was sentenced to ten years in federal prison. The other, **Gonzola Orosco Velasquez**, also of Queens, New York, was found not guilty after trial.

Also arrested in the same investigation on February 9, 2003:

Carlos Villegas, 25, of 62 Hendricks Street, Central Falls, was sentenced to 46 months in federal prison after admitting that he delivered cocaine for Montegio; agents found about 2.7 kilograms of cocaine in the basement of Villegas's home;

Emanuel G. Fernandes, 23, of 452 Weeden Street, Pawtucket, was sentenced to ten years in federal prison after agents found about 81 grams of crack cocaine and cocaine-trafficking materials in his apartment.

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The **HIDTA Task Force**, which investigated the case, is led by the **Federal Bureau of Investigation** and the **Rhode Island State Police**. Detectives from the **Central Falls, Cranston, East Providence, Pawtucket, Providence, Warwick, and Woonsocket Police Departments** participated in the Task Force investigation. The **Rhode Island National Guard** provided administrative support to the HIDTA Task Force.

Assistant U.S. Attorney's Madden, Mary E. Rogers, and Michael P. Iannotti prosecuted the cases.

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